DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 262 509 EC 180 917

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TITLE	Developing Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for the Gifted and Talented. 1985 Digest, Revised.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Handicapped and Gifted Children, Reston, Va.
SPONS AGENCY	National Inst. of Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	85
CONTRACT	400-84-0010
NOTE	3p.
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC Clearinghouse on Handicapped and Gifted Children, 1920 Association Dr., Reston, VA 22091 (one free copy).
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Information Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis Products (071)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Elementary Secondary Education; *Gifted; *Individualized Education Programs; Program Development; *Talent
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

The digest extends the concept of Individualized Education Programs (IEP) to gifted and talented children. IEPs are defined as written documents, developed and revised annually with input from parents, teachers, and where appropriate, the students themselves. IEP content includes a realistic assessment of current performance, reasonable expectations for learning over the year, and suggestions for evaluation strategies. Components of the IEP are explained to include (1) a written statement of the child's present level of educational performance; (2) a statement of annual goals to be achieved by the child; (3) short-term objectives to be realized in the achievement of each annual goal; (4) a statement of appropriate objectives, criteria, evaluation procedures, and schedules for determining whether the instructional objectives are being achieved; (5) a statement of the participation in a regular education program, and for what purposes; (6) a description of all special education and related services required to meet the students' needs; and (7) the projected starting dates for, and duration of these services. (CL)

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1985
DIGEST

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DEVELOPING INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAMS (IEPs) FOR THE GIFTED AND TALENTED

Historically, the fact that individual children possess certain physical, emotional, and learning characteristics which distinguish them from other children has led educators to realize the importance and desirability of developing educational programs which meet the individual needs of their students. More recently, considerable legislation and litigation, at both state and federal levels, have been interpreted as establishing the need for individualized education programs (IEPs) for all children. To date, largely because of semantic restrictions in much of the current law, gifted and talented children are not usually included in most IEP mandates. Nevertheless, growing numbers of educators and policy makers at state and local levels are rapidly realizing that the unique needs of this population justify their inclusion in the development and implementation of such mandates.

What Is an IEP?

An IEP is a written document, developed and revised annually in a conference involving the child's parents and teacher(s), a qualified special education representative of the education agency (other than the teacher), and where appropriate, the child. The program must be a realistic assessment of the child's present level of performance, and should present a reasonable expectation of what the child can learn over the course of one year, as well as the identification of appropriate evaluation strategies to determine the student's progress.

What Should the IEP Include?

A child's IEP should include at least the following:

- *A written statement of the child's present levels of educational performance.* Before an IEP planning team can determine the child's needs, a survey of all relevant formal and informal information should be made. This information can be acquired from current school files and personnel, and from people, e.g., parents, who have contact with the child in formal settings. This information will provide a more balanced picture for determining the most appropriate instructional environment for the child.
- *A statement of annual goals to be achieved by the child.* Annual goals are written statements of what the child can be expected to learn in the educational program, as well as the targets toward which the child's learning is to be directed in specific instructional areas. Identification of annual goals must begin by assessing the child's present levels of functioning to determine the content and skills which need emphasis. IEP planners for gifted and talented children should consider factors such as the areas and degree of giftedness, special abilities, specific deficits or disabilities, learning rates, and behavioral factors. Reasonable goals for gifted and talented children should challenge their abilities without frustrating them, be broad enough to allow for unexpected gains, and enhance those that are expected.
- *Short term objectives to be realized in the achievement of each annual goal.* Short term objectives are specific units of learning which serve annual goals within instructional areas. They should be mastered in relatively short time periods, depending on learning characteristics and their specificity. Short term objectives may be derived from published curricula, collections of objectives for specific instructional areas, and from teacher-written objectives. Objectives should also include a method for evaluating the child's program.
- *A statement of appropriate objectives, criteria, evaluation procedures, and schedules for determining whether the instructional objectives are being achieved.* Procedures for evaluating student mastery of objectives should be decided on by the IEP team.
- *A statement of the extent to which the student will be able to benefit from participation in a regular education program, and for what purposes.* Like other exceptional children, gifted and talented children should participate in educational programs in the least restrictive environment, in order to optimize the student's educational and social growth in consonance with his or her ability to benefit.

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- ***A description of all special education and related services required to meet the student's need.*** Both special and related services should be stipulated in the IEP. A description of special requirements should include the type of classroom services (resource room, self-contained class, etc.), the number of times per week the student is to be in a special setting, length of attendance, and a specific statement of what related services are to be delivered, why, by whom, and for how long.

- *The projected starting dates for, and duration of, these services.* The date for service delivery should be specified in the IEP. Actual placement occurs following the development of the IEP. Services should continue for one year and the termination date should be stated. Changes in the IEP can be made during the year and should be recorded.

These steps encompass the basics of an IEP for a gifted and talented student. Because the program is individualized, variations can and will occur within these guidelines. For more information concerning the development of IEPs for gifted and talented children, write your state department of education's consultant for gifted and talented education.

RESOURCES

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Revised by Joanne Rand Whitmore, The Association for the Gifted, a division of The Council for Exceptional Children.

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The National Institute of Education

This publication was prepared with funding from the National Institute of Education, U.S. Department of Education, under contract no. NIE-400-84-0010. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of NIE or the Department of Education.